

Mexico

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Integrate the Guatemalans in refugee settlements through the facilitation of legal documentation, the provision of basic infrastructure, the promotion of self-sufficiency through access to credit and the promotion of social integration through a comprehensive community training programme; offer long-term solutions while developing uniform criteria for material assistance to urban refugees; promote accession to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and develop national structures for their implementation; develop national constituencies to increase awareness of UNHCR.

Impact

- Mexico ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons in June 2000.
- The local integration programme was finalised for Guatemalan refugees living in the southern states of Campeche and Quintana Roo.
- 2,540 refugees were naturalised and 5,749 received migratory resident documents.
- Self-sufficiency in Chiapas was brought nearer with the completion of 30 major infrastructure works and the establishment of 13 communal credit associations involving 724 refugee partners (50 per cent women).



Main Refugee Origin/Type of Population	Persons of Concern			
	Total in Country ¹	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent Female	Per cent under 18
Guatemala (Refugees)	16,000	14,800	50	58
El Salvador (Refugees)	2,000	300	47	24

¹In addition, there were about 460 other refugees from 42 different countries (32 of them non-Latin-American)

Income and Expenditure (USD)				
Annual Programme Budget				
Revised Budget	Income from Contributions ¹	Other Funds Available ²	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure
5,960,002	550,000	5,313,302	5,863,302	5,863,302

¹Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

²Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

Mexico has a long tradition of asylum, as witnessed by its response to a sizeable influx from Guatemala in the early 1980s. Working with both Mexican and Guatemalan governments, UNHCR assisted in the voluntary repatriation of more than 43,000 refugees from 1984 until 1999. The Migratory Stabilisation Plan, first offered to refugees in Campeche and Quintana Roo in 1996 and later extended to Chiapas, provided local integration and accelerated naturalisation as lasting solutions for the 22,000 Guatemalan refugees who chose to remain.

UNHCR's Regional Office in Mexico is responsible for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees throughout the region. Lacking appropriate procedures in Mexico and many Central American countries, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination under its mandate for new arrivals. It continues to advocate the enactment of national legislation and the establishment of proper status determination mechanisms.

Constraints

The distinctive format of the migratory documents issued to Guatemalan refugees in Chiapas by the national government is generally not recognised by local authorities, leading to cases of detention. The uneven application of regulations has resulted in a number of refugee children being denied access to birth registration procedures. UNHCR will continue vigorously to advocate the standardisation of personal documentation and the equal application of procedures. The transition to a new government slowed down the work of UNHCR's governmental implementing partner during the latter half of the year. This particularly affected the completion of land transfer to newly naturalised refugees in Campeche and Quintana Roo. The complex legal issues involved will necessitate UNHCR's involvement at least through 2001.

The naturalisation process for refugees in urban areas is not on the same fast track as that for Guatemalan refugees in south and south-eastern Mexico. Progress has been impeded by the difficulties in meeting government criteria and the complexity of the bureaucratic process. Many refugees from outside the region find attaining self-sufficiency difficult due to cultural and language barriers, and there are few suitable jobs available to refugees.

Funding

UNHCR's continued financial difficulties in 2000 led to a series of reductions affecting four projects. The

hardest hit was the Chiapas programme, which suffered a 21 per cent reduction of its total budget. As a result, naturalisation efforts were severely restricted, infrastructural work was postponed, including water systems, electrification and school buildings for 3,600 refugee children; education, community services and credit programmes were revised. Reductions in partner staffing in the communal credit programme for example, resulted in achievement of only 70 per cent of the initial project objectives. Newly arrived refugees received limited assistance, and three training activities were cancelled (two dealing with gender issues).

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

A highly significant achievement was Mexico's ratification of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons. At the same time, Mexico adopted implementing legislation by modifying the regulations related to the General Population Law. By year's end, the Government of Mexico had also established a national eligibility committee although it is not yet operational.

In a region where migration is a critical issue on the political agenda, UNHCR is raising the visibility of asylum in the context of larger migration flows. UNHCR helped migration officers and other governmental authorities to acquire greater knowledge of protection issues through a series of 30 refugee law training seminars benefiting 600 persons. The impact of these mutual efforts was evident in the response of the Mexican authorities during a crisis on its northern border involving Iraqi asylum-seekers, in the ongoing consultations with border migration authorities in Chiapas and in the increased numbers of asylum-seekers referred to UNHCR. UNHCR helped to focus greater attention on asylum issues within existing human rights networks. It established a refugee protection network in Mexico that involved NGOs working mainly with migrants but with an interest in refugees.

UNHCR ensures that special consideration is given to the particular needs of women asylum-seekers and that refugee women have individual access to eligibility procedures and personal documentation. UNHCR has also actively addressed the issue of violence against women refugees. In 2000, UNHCR counselled 100 individuals involved in cases related to violence within marriage, sexual violence, discrimination, abandonment, child support and child custody.

UNHCR's operations in Mexico emphasise self-sufficiency and durable solutions. Through the local integration programme for Guatemalan refugees, over 2,500 Guatemalan refugees were naturalised and the remaining refugees had their residency documents renewed. Central American refugees in urban areas have managed to integrate further into Mexican society, socially and economically; UNHCR assisted 59 urban

refugees with their naturalisation applications. In addition, 195 urban refugees, over half of them women, received immigrant or residency documents that allow them to work in Mexico.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: Community services activities were aimed at providing vulnerable, disabled and



abused refugees with financial and psychological support to enable them to integrate more easily into Mexican society. In Chiapas, of the 124 registered vulnerable cases, 78 achieved self-sufficiency as a result of UNHCR's funding of housing and productive projects. Thirty-four refugee facilitators (half of them women) completed a five-module "train-the-trainers" course. They then assisted 1,740 refugees in 43 settlements, using the *Manual for Living in Mexico* developed in co-ordination with the Government and local agencies to highlight important themes in the integration process. Due to financial constraints, the training programme on children's rights and development planned for 50 local teachers was only delivered to six teachers. For urban refugees, agreements were maintained with 15 specialised public and private institutions offering free or low-cost services such as health care, help for women victims of domestic violence and orientation for elderly refugees.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: In 2000, 77 persons, of whom 20 were women, were officially recognised as refugees. After an assessment of their needs, 67 of them were assisted with food and/or lodging for a period of two to six months. Assistance for a longer period was provided for a limited number of refugees with severe mental health problems.

Education: UNHCR supported the education of more than 460 refugees (children and adults) in 2000. Due to funding constraints, 92 refugee students lost their scholarships. However, the Office continued to provide scholarships for 296 adolescents and adults in secondary school, vocational training or adult education. Spanish classes were provided for 68 newly-arrived refugees; 14 refugees received assistance for vocational training. As 60 per cent of the Guatemalan refugees are illiterate and most of these are women, UNHCR in Chiapas has arranged for the national adult education institution to extend its services to both men and women refugees.

Health/Nutrition: Given the limitations of reproductive health services in Chiapas, UNHCR supported ten rural health posts for refugee women. Run by a local NGO partner, these posts provided 4,243 consultations, twice the target figure. UNHCR also provided limited support to local private health organisations providing more specialised clinical intervention. UNHCR assisted 255 patients (70 per cent women) including 157 cases requiring hospitalisation. In September, UNHCR was able to begin a partnership with an international NGO, which provided laboratories for the refugee health promoters network. At the

end of 2001, UNHCR will terminate its funding but this international NGO will continue to ensure that refugee women have access to facilities not previously available locally. Some financial support for medical assistance was provided to urban refugees. Comprehensive coverage was offered only to newly-arrived refugees or refugees categorised as extremely vulnerable. A total of 132 refugees received assistance.

Income Generation: After extensive analysis of the previous programme, UNHCR established a more effective communal credit system in Chiapas this year, managed by the communities with minimal technical support from an NGO partner. Thirteen communal credit associations were set up in 46 communities for 724 partners. Of these, 484 (54 per cent of them women) received credits for productive projects (agricultural or commercial). Despite this success, the number of people hired to promote refugee credit was reduced from 17 to eight due to budget constraints.

Legal Assistance: In Campeche and Quintana Roo, the payment toward the last 861 naturalisation cards has resulted in 98.8 per cent of the population now having some form of legal resident documentation. UNHCR strongly advocated for co-ownership of land by naturalised refugee couples; the result was the first formal issuance of 1,067 land titles by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform. Although UNHCR will continue working with a technical committee on the transfer of donated land to naturalised refugees, the integration programme for this population has terminated. In Chiapas, 5,370 refugees, nearly all adult refugees, had their documentation renewed. This included 283 refugees not in refugee settlements who had previously never been registered. Despite plans to increase naturalisation efforts in 2000, funding restrictions resulted in only 194 naturalisation cards being processed, of which only 94 were actually issued. Among the long-standing Central American refugees, 36 naturalisation applications were granted and 51 remain pending. In addition, 379 urban refugees received residence documents with UNHCR's assistance. UNHCR's 50th Anniversary gave the region a special opportunity to raise public awareness of refugee issues and the organisation's activities. The theme of "Respect" ran throughout such activities as seminars, theatre, the preparation and public showing of videos and short pieces broadcast on prime-time television and cable channels. The media was continuously informed of refugee situations and UNHCR's activities through press briefings; on average, UNHCR featured in the Mexican news media twice a month.

Operational Support (to Agencies): Rationalising resources, UNHCR terminated its funding of four partners while continuing to support the administrative costs of three NGOs and one government partner. In Mexico City, UNHCR's partner reduced costs through bilateral agreements with service providers and made in-kind donations of materials for new arrivals.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: In support of local integration, specific refugee communities in Chiapas had to be relocated to land that would not be legally contested by local residents. These new sites required basic infrastructure. Despite successive budget reductions, 30 major infrastructure works (including 23 water systems) were completed in 2000 for the benefit of 4,660 refugees in 13 communities. In planning the distance from tap stands to houses UNHCR gave special consideration to women's needs. Forty-one committees in refugee settlements received training on how to maintain and adapt basic infrastructure.

Transport/Logistics: UNHCR's governmental partner provided transportation to move 114 refugee families to new locations within the state of Chiapas. Eleven families repatriated to Guatemala. Only 18 refugees residing in urban areas were repatriated.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

UNHCR has offices in Mexico City and Comitán (Chiapas). Financial constraints resulted in the reduction of six posts. At the end of the year, reflecting region-wide responsibilities, staffing in Mexico stood at 28: eight internationals, four UNVs and 16 local staff.

Working with Others

UNHCR worked with three local NGO partners in Mexico and one government partner which managed the Guatemalan refugee integration project. Through its partners, UNHCR also maintained working relationships with the Mexican Institute of Social Security, Marie Stopes International, the National Institute for Old Age, Popular Action for Integration and a number of hospitals, psychiatric institutions, hostels and community organisations.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Despite repeated budget reductions, operations in Mexico made progress and, in some areas, surpassed planned target figures. Naturalisation enabled thou-

sands of refugees to find long-term security through legal integration. Unfortunately, naturalisation efforts in Chiapas suffered the effects of budgetary constraints. UNHCR is exploring with the Mexican Government various possible ways of naturalising the remaining Guatemalans.

Overall efficiency was improved by the reduction in the number of partners in Chiapas, coupled with a more focused programme. In the majority of sectors, target figures were surpassed, and, in some cases, doubled, as in reproductive health services. A remodelled assistance strategy was based on vocational training instead of handouts. It addressed chronic problems faced by vulnerable refugees and enabled 94 per cent of identified cases to attain a minimum level of self-sufficiency.

In light of continued funding constraints, the reintegration operation in Chiapas will need to phase down more rapidly than originally planned. The lack of an NGO or developmental agency presence in Chiapas has been problematic. UNHCR recognises that it could have done more at an earlier stage by establishing more linkages, like those with the national literacy programme.

The Office will need to review, clarify and quantify its joint strategy with its government partner for the eligibility committee and its support role vis-à-vis urban refugees. With the new government team now in place, the eligibility committee should be fully operational in 2001.

Offices

Mexico City

Chiapas
Comitán

Partners

Government Agencies

Commission for Assistance to Refugees

NGOs

Capacitación, Asesoría, Medio Ambiente y Defensa del Derecho a la Salud

Desarrollo Sustentable para la Mujer y la Niñez

Investigación y Desarrollo Femenino

Promotores de Administración y Contabilidad para Empresas de Producción, Industrialización y Comercio

Red de Mujeres Proderechos de la Salud y Educación

Sin Fronteras

Other

Administración de Recursos Humanos

Financial Report (USD)				
Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects		Prior Years' Projects	
		notes		notes
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	833,254		0	
Community Services	216,073		198,240	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	97,235		34,138	
Education	180,531		253,813	
Fisheries	0		15,642	
Food	0		27,508	
Forestry	0		70,110	
Health / Nutrition	220,133		202,317	
Income Generation	247,258		403,738	
Legal Assistance	466,168		205,606	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	596,491		354,807	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	768,230		906,792	
Transport / Logistics	58,036		91,597	
Transit Accounts	0		(31,926)	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	826,066		(2,441,804)	
Sub-total Operational	4,509,475		290,578	
Programme Support	1,337,060		14,839	
Sub-total Disbursements / Deliveries	5,846,535	(3)	305,417	(6)
Unliquidated Obligations	16,767	(3)	0	
Total	5,863,302	(1) (3)	305,417	

Instalments with Implementing Partners

Payments Made	3,174,424		236,328	
Reporting Received	2,348,358		2,678,132	
Balance	826,066		(2,441,804)	
Outstanding 1 January	0		2,430,039	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		7,082	
Currency Adjustment	112		26,359	
Outstanding 31 December	826,178		7,512	

Unliquidated Obligations

Outstanding 1 January	0		347,807	(6)
New Obligations	5,863,302	(1)	0	
Disbursements	5,846,535	(3)	305,419	(6)
Cancellations	0		42,388	(6)
Outstanding 31 December	16,767	(3)	0	(6)

Figures which cross reference to Accounts:

(1) Annex to Statement 1

(3) Schedule 3

(6) Schedule 6